



COMMISSIONER SID MILLER

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
2015 SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM
REQUEST FOR APPLICATION
COMPETITIVE GRANT APPLICATION

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Please read all materials before preparing and submitting the application. Failure to follow the instructions and requirements described in this Request for Application (RFA) may result in the disqualification of the application.

Projected Timeline of Events

Application Availability	February 2015
Application Deadline	March 24, 2015
Preliminary Selection	May 2015
Selected Projects submitted to USDA	July 2015
Award Announcements	October 2015
Start Date of Project	December 1, 2015
End Date of Project	December 31, 2016

Statement of Purpose

Pursuant to the Texas Agriculture Code, Sections 12.002 and 12.007, the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) hereby requests proposals for reimbursable projects designed to solely enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) funds will be made available to Texas from the Federal United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) 2015 fiscal year budget.

Although the United States Department of Agriculture – Agricultural Marketing Service (USDA-AMS) has not officially released SCBGP funds to the states, TDA anticipates approximately \$2.2 million will be available for Texas projects. This figure is subject to change.

The SCBGP is authorized under section 101 of the Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act of 2004 (7 U.S.C. 1621 note) and amended under section 10010 of the Agricultural Act of 2014, Public Law 113-79 (the Farm Bill). SCBGP is currently implemented under 7 CFR part 1291 (published March 27, 2009; 74 FR 13313).

Eligibility

Responses will **only** be accepted from producer, industry or community-based organizations involved with, or that promote specialty crops.

- Projects must demonstrate that they enhance the competitiveness of a Texas specialty crop industry.
- Project funds may only be used for activities benefiting specialty crops.
- Projects must benefit more than one individual, institution or organization. Grant funds will not be awarded for projects that directly benefit or provide a profit to a single organization, institution or individual.
- Applications will not be accepted where the primary applicant is an educational institution.
- Producer, industry or community-based organizations involved with specialty crops may partner with an educational institution; however, the primary applicant must be a producer, industry or community-based organizations involved with specialty crops.

Grantee Responsibilities and Accountability

The grantee has full responsibility for the conduct of the project and for the results achieved. Each grantee shall monitor the day-to-day performance of the grant project to assure adherence to statutes, regulations, and grant terms and conditions. The grantee will carry out the activities described in the scope of work to achieve project goals, objectives, and desired outcomes.

The grantee will be accountable for all grant funds and must ensure all funds are used solely for authorized purposes. Selected projects will receive funding on a cost-reimbursement basis.

The grantee must ensure:

- Funds are used only for activities covered by the approved project.
- Funds are not used in violation of the restrictions and prohibitions of applicable statutes.
- All budget and performance reports are completed in a timely manner.

Each grantee must ensure they have an adequate accounting system in place and good internal controls to ensure expenditures and reimbursements are reported and maintained for a minimum of three years after the conclusion of the project.

Funding Areas and Priorities

Specialty crops are defined as fruits and vegetables, dried fruit, tree nuts and nursery crops (including floriculture). Refer to the following website for a list of common specialty crops: www.ams.usda.gov/scbgp.

TDA encourages organizations to develop projects to solely enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops pertaining to the following five (5) key areas affecting the specialty crop industry. Applicants are responsible for selecting the key area that best fits their project.

Research projects in all focus areas should be applied research and results should be available to producers, processors and/or consumers within one to two years of the grant term date. Projects with a large research component will be evaluated on their ability to document and transfer results to the industry.

In addition, TDA may choose to use a portion of the funds for projects conducted internally, including, but not limited to, outreach activities, nutrition, regulatory or marketing. Internal projects will also be evaluated in the competitive process.

A. Food Safety

TDA will consider projects that assist production specialty crop agricultural operations in continuing to supply the safest food in the world.

Project examples include, but are not limited to:

- § Assisting entities in the specialty crop distribution chain in developing “Good Agricultural Practices,” “Good Handling Practices” or “Good Manufacturing Practices”
- § Researching new methods to improve food safety
- § Marketing or outreach to specialty crop producers/distributors regarding new or upcoming food safety requirements

B. Nutrition

TDA will consider projects that improve access and consumption of specialty crops. Ensuring access to healthy foods in underserved low-income areas of Texas and increasing Texans’ access to and consumption of fruits, vegetables and tree nuts is a key strategy to improve human health.

All projects must increase the competitiveness of specialty crops and clearly demonstrate a benefit to the specialty crop industry. TDA will consider projects that integrate human health and nutrition into proposals that also show a direct impact on specialty crops.

- Food Security

Project examples include, but are not limited to:

- § Increasing participation in under-utilized federal nutrition assistance programs
- § Developing innovative projects that support local and regional food systems
- § Improving access to affordable, nutritious and culturally appropriate food in ways that foster self-reliance, enhance dignity and assure environmental sustainability

- Healthy Eating

Project examples include, but are not limited to:

- § Increasing consumption of specialty crops among all populations
- § Developing farm-to-fork networks that include schools, worksites, retail, and restaurant outlets to connect local agriculture with nearby communities
- § Promoting and/or demonstrating the health benefits of Texas specialty crops

C. Plant Health

TDA will consider proposals that address pests and diseases that affect the production of Texas’ specialty crops. This includes research related to the probability and impact of invasive pest, disease and weed threats to specialty crops and research to develop tools to detect, eradicate and control pests and disease. Results should be available to producers, processors or consumers within one to two years of grant term date.

TDA will also consider projects that enhance the conservation or improve the quality of agricultural land, water, habitat and biodiversity, as well as, proposals that address specialty crops’ contribution to adaptation and/or mitigation of climate change.

- Plant Health and Pest Challenges

Project examples include, but are not limited to:

- § Enhancing the speed and reliability of detection

- § Developing new tools for eradication
- § Developing plants resistant to pests and disease
- § Evaluating organic and sustainable practices

- Environmental Concerns and Conservation

Project examples include, but are not limited to:

- § Evaluating water use efficiency in regards to current drought conditions and for climate change adaptation
- § Assisting growers to adapt to climate change by conducting research and demonstrating the implementation of strategies where technologies are already available - especially water use efficiency and invasive pest detection, control and management
- § Accelerating implementation of Best Management Practices (BMP) for water conservation and efficiency, including development of a BMP manual for specific specialty crops

D. Value Added Projects and Industry Development

TDA will consider projects that add to the value of specialty crops, or develop new ideas, tools or information that increase the benefit to the industry.

Project examples include, but are not limited to:

- § Providing support for development of value added processing facilities
- § Strengthening specialty crop agricultural career technical education through establishment of certification programs for critical job training
- § Improvement of distribution methods both domestically and internationally
- § Evaluating industry feasibility or development of a new industry
- § Conducting market research of consumer preference
- § Researching a new tool to improve marketability
- § Developing new and improved specialty crop variety/use, technology advancements and growing season extensions in an effort to diversify and strengthen specialty crop production

E. Marketing

TDA will consider projects that improve consumers' knowledge and understanding of specialty crops through education and outreach. Additionally, TDA will consider projects that increase or develop long-term sales, consumption and competitiveness of specialty crop products, including international marketing and trade activities.

- Agriculture Education/Outreach

Project examples include, but are not limited to:

- § Promoting Texas specialty crops and strengthening the connection between specialty crops and agriculture

- § Extending science-based information to specialty crop growers and other key stakeholders
 - § Educating consumers about Texas' specialty crops and agriculture
 - § Reconnecting communities with specialty crop production
 - § Educating the public about the identity and threat of invasive species to Texas specialty crops
 - § Promoting/marketing specialty crop certification and/or education program opportunities that further enhance critical job skills
- **Market Enhancement and Promotion**
Project examples include, but are not limited to:
 - § Conducting statewide promotion and awareness activities of specialty crops
 - § Targeting specialty crop marketing concepts on the unique characteristics of local and regional areas such as culture, geography, history, and types of agricultural production
 - § Developing cooperative marketing and promotions such as cross-menu promotions of specialty crops
 - § Marketing agritourism as it relates to specialty crop
 - § Creating innovative consumer/trade promotions in foreign markets

Funding Parameters, Award Information and Notification

- Projects awarded funding in the 2015 SCBGP will begin after the implementation of the Office of Management and Budget's Uniform Guidance ("Supercircular"). State, local or Indian tribal governments, non-profit organizations, colleges and universities will be subject to 2 CFR 200, Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards. For-profit organizations will be subject to 48 CFR Subpart 31.2. All organization types are subject to 7 CFR 3015 and 7 CFR 3052.
- Projects may be funded at varying levels depending on the nature of the project.
- Projects must demonstrate strong justification for the requested budget, as well as, the potential for providing significant demonstrable benefits to Texas specialty crops.
- Where more than one (1) proposal on an eligible research topic is acceptable for funding, TDA may request cooperation between grantees or revision/adjustment to a proposal in order to avoid duplication and to realize the maximum benefit to the state.
- TDA reserves the right to accept or reject any or all proposals submitted. TDA is under no legal or other obligation to execute a grant on the basis of a response submitted to this RFA. TDA shall not pay for any costs incurred by any entity in responding to this RFA.
- The public announcements and written notifications will be made to all applicants and their affiliated agencies, organizations, or institutions. Favorable decisions will indicate the amount of award, duration of the grant, and any special conditions associated with the project.

Term of Funding or Duration of Projects

- Selected projects will be funded for work that must be completed between December 1, 2015 and December 31, 2016.
- Proposals may be resubmitted in subsequent years to be considered for continued/additional funding.

Proposal Requirements

Each concept proposal shall not exceed six (6) pages (not including supporting documents). The acceptable font size is 12 point, and all margins must be 1 inch. The Application Form with proposal narrative form and instruction documents can be downloaded from the TDA website under the Grants and Services tab at www.TexasAgriculture.gov.

Grant Proposals --Interested applicants must include all of the following information:

1. **Application Form**
2. **Proposal Narrative**– Must address the following information:
 - a. Project Title
 - b. Primary Applicant
 - c. Partner Organization(s) –list name(s) of organization(s) assisting on the project
 - d. Abstract
 - e. Project Purpose
 - f. Potential Impact
 - g. Expected Measurable Outcomes
 - h. Project Oversight
 - i. Project Commitment
 - j. Work Plan
 - k. Long Term Plan
 - l. Budget Snapshot
 - m. Budget Narrative/Justification

Evaluation and Selection Information

TDA will conduct an administrative review to determine whether the applicant was responsive to the requirements of this RFA. TDA will take into consideration the status of any open project's progress.

In addition, a review team including external experts and/or stakeholders will competitively review all proposals, in all categories, to evaluate the project's ability to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. Projects that are selected to be included in TDA's state plan must show a direct benefit to specialty crops. Proposals will be scored using the criteria set forth in the Proposal Evaluation Sheet.

Deadline for Submission of Responses

The complete application packet including the proposal with signatures must be **RECEIVED** by **5:00 p.m. (Central Time) on Tuesday, March 24, 2015**. It is the applicant's responsibility to submit all materials necessary for evaluation early enough to ensure timely delivery. *Late or incomplete proposals will not be accepted. Applicants may not supplement or amend the application after the deadline.*

In addition, the narrative **must** be submitted via email to Grants@TexasAgriculture.gov in a format which allows the text copy function to be operational, such as Microsoft Word (.doc, .docx) or Adobe Acrobat (.pdf).

The preferred method of submission is electronic. Complete proposal narrative and application with signature must be submitted to:

Email: Grants@TexasAgriculture.gov

The e-mail subject line must contain 1-3 word description of project and "SC 2015 – organization name". The respondent is solely responsible for ensuring that their complete application, regardless of method of delivery, is sent to, and actually received by, TDA in a timely manner and at the proper destination.

IMPORTANT NOTE: TDA recommends a limit on the attachments to 10MB each. This may result in sending multiple e-mails for the submission of all documentation contained in a response.

All submissions must be sent in Microsoft Word or other Word compatible format or as .PDF files. Unreadable submissions may be deemed unresponsive and will not be reviewed for funding consideration.

TDA takes no responsibility for electronic bids that are captured, blocked, filtered, quarantined or otherwise prevented from reaching the proper destination server by any TDA anti-virus or other security software.

Physical Address:

Texas Department of Agriculture
Trade & Business Development - Grants
Office
1700 North Congress Avenue
Austin, Texas 78701

Mailing Address:

Texas Department of Agriculture
Trade & Business Development - Grants
Office
P.O. Box 12847
Austin, Texas 78711

Contact Information

For questions regarding submission of the application and/or TDA requirements, please contact Grant Office at (512) 463-6908 or by email at Grants@TexasAgriculture.gov.

Successful Application Requirements.

Reporting. Selected applicants will be required to submit periodic performance reports. Reporting timelines will be provided in the grant agreement. As part of TDA's ongoing monitoring of grant funds, grantees must show both a strong progress of work completed on all projects as well as financial progress. Failure to comply with reporting requirements may result in the withholding of a request for reimbursement and/or termination of the award.

Budget Development Information.

- A. **Payment.** Grantees will be required to submit payment requests quarterly, but no more frequently than monthly in order to show significant financial and programmatic progress. Payment requests must include sufficient detail and supporting documentation. Backup detail may include, but is not limited to, documentation of personnel expenses, or copies of invoices.
- B. **Payment Schedule.** Up to 90% of the total grant award may be paid provided the work for which payment is requested has been completed and proper documentation has been submitted. The remaining 10% will only be disbursed once all reporting requirements have been met, including, but not limited to, the final performance report.
- C. **Eligible Expenses.** Generally, expenses that are necessary and reasonable for proper and efficient performance and administration of the project are eligible. Grant funds may not be used to supplant normal business costs but instead must be used to cover the costs incurred for the approved proposed activities. Examples of eligible expenditures include:
 - 1. Personnel costs – including salary and benefits;
 - 2. Direct operating expenses (other) - any expenses that do not fall into the other categories directly related to the proposed activities;
 - 3. Supplies that cost less than \$5,000, such as office supplies, printing services, and materials needed to accomplish the proposed project;
 - 4. Contracts – agreements made with a third-party to perform a portion of the award;
 - 5. Travel, including mileage reimbursement, transportation and lodging;
 - 6. Controlled Assets are defined as certain items valued \$500.00 - \$4,999.99 which must also be inventoried, link to [Controlled Property Listing](https://fmxcpa.state.tx.us/fmx/spa/classcodes/control.php). (<https://fmxcpa.state.tx.us/fmx/spa/classcodes/control.php>)
 - 7. Capital Expenditures – Equipment that has a useful life of more than one year or a cost of more than \$5,000. CAPITAL EXPENDITURES MUST BE SUBMITTED FOR APPROVAL TO TDA PRIOR TO EXPENDITURE / PURCHASE. Failure to secure written approval from TDA will result in disallowance of the cost; and
 - 8. Indirect costs: The maximum allowable rate set by the Specialty Crop Block grant program regulations is 8%.

- D. Ineligible Expenses.** Expenses may be prohibited by state or federal law or determined to be ineligible by program guidelines. Examples of these expenditures include, but are not limited to the following:
1. Alcoholic beverages;
 2. Entertainment;
 3. Contributions, charitable or political;
 4. Expenses falling outside of the contract period;
 5. Expenses for expenditures not listed in the project budget or an approved amendment;
 6. Expenses that are not adequately documented;
 7. Meal reimbursements related to travel, meetings, conferences or other events;
 8. Advertising and Public Relations costs designed solely to promote the image of an organization, general logo, or general brand rather than eligible specialty crops are unallowable. A promotional campaign to increase sales of "XYZ Grown" Watermelon is acceptable while increasing brand awareness of "XYZ Grown" generally, is not. Promoting tomatoes while including an organization's logo in the promotion is acceptable, while generally promoting an organization's logo is not.
 9. Coupon/incentive redemptions or price discounts. Costs associated with printing, distribution, or promotion of coupons/tokens or price discounts (i.e., a print advertisement that contains a clip-out coupon) are allowable only if they solely promote the specialty crop rather than promote or benefit a program or single organization.
 10. Costs associated with the use of trade shows, meeting rooms, display, demonstrations, exhibits, and the rental of space are allowable only if they solely promote the specialty crop. Cost sharing to promote both specialty crops and non-specialty crops is not allowable for these types of expenses.

General Information.

Selected applicants will receive a Notice of Grant Award (NGA) letter and an official Grant Agreement from TDA. The NGA is not legally binding until a grant agreement is fully executed.

TDA reserves the right to fund projects partially or fully. TDA reserves the right to reject all applications and is not liable for costs incurred by the Applicant in the development, submission, or review of the application, or for costs incurred by the Applicant prior to the effective date of grant agreement.

Right to Amend or Terminate Program

TDA reserves the right to alter, amend, or clarify any provisions, terms, or conditions of this program or any grant awarded as a result thereof, or to terminate this program at any time prior to the execution of an agreement, if TDA deems any such action to be in the best interest of TDA and of the State of Texas. The decision of TDA will be administratively final in this regard.

Public Information

All applications submitted under this program are subject to release as public information, unless the application or specific parts of any such application can be shown to be excepted from disclosure subject to the Texas Public Information Act, Chapter 552 of the Government Code.

Conflict of Interest

The Applicant is required to disclose any existing or potential conflicts of interest relative to this grant program. Failure to disclose any such relationship may result in the Applicant's disqualification or termination of agreement.

General Compliance Information.

1. Grantees must comply with TDA's reporting requirements and financial procedures outlined in the grant agreement. Any delegation by the Grantee to a subcontractor regarding any duties and responsibilities imposed by the grant award must be approved in advance by TDA and shall not relieve the Grantee of its responsibilities to TDA for their performance.
2. All grant awards are subject to the availability of funds appropriated and authorized by the Texas Legislature.
3. Grantees must remain in full compliance with state and federal laws and regulations. Non-compliance may result in termination of the grant or ineligibility for reimbursement of expenses.
4. Grantees must keep a separate bookkeeping account with a complete record of all expenditures relating to the project. Records shall be maintained for three (3) years after the completion of the project, or as otherwise agreed upon with TDA. TDA and the Texas State Auditor's Office (SAO) reserve the right to examine all books, documents, records, and accounts relating to the project at any time throughout the duration of the agreement and for three years immediately following completion of the project. If any litigation, claim, negotiation, audit or other action is initiated prior to the expiration of the retention period, then the records must be retained until authorized by TDA. TDA and the SAO shall have access to the physical locations related to project activities.
5. If the Grantee has a financial audit performed during the time the Grantee is receiving funds from TDA, upon request, TDA shall have access to information about the audit, including the audit transmittal letter, management letter, and any schedules in which the Grantee's funds are included.
6. Grantees must comply with Texas Government Code, Chapter 783, Uniform Grant and Contract Management, and the Uniform Grant Management Standards (UGMS), 2 CFR 215, 2 CFR 220, 2 CFR 225, and 2 CFR 230, if applicable.